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Soviet Transfer of US Lend-Lease Freighter to North Korea

The USSR apparently has transferred the old US lend-lease freighter Tashkent to North Korea.

two old Soviet merchant ships were transferred to the Government of North Korea at Ch'ongjin on 1 March 1967 . In April 1967 the North Korean press mentioned for the first time two fishing fleet mother ships, the Kolbi-San-Ho and the Mai Boone San, indicating that this was their first season with the fishing fleet. There is no evidence that North Korea received any new dry cargo ships suitable for use as mother ships either from Free World sources or from its own modest shipyards prior to the last quarter of 1967. In August 1967, a Soviet radio broadcast reported on the transfer of the freighter Tashkent to North Korea and in February 1968, a North Korean ship identified as the Kolbi-San-Ho in the Soviet Far Eastern port of Nakhodka was the former Tashkent.

The Tashkent is a steamer built in the US in 1914. It was transferred to the USSR during World War II under terms of the Lend-Lease Act and retained in the Soviet merchant fleet after the war. US attempts to reach agreement with the USSR on either the return of the lend-lease ships in Soviet custody or reimbursement for them have thus far been fruitless. When last reported under the Soviet flag in mid-1966 the Tashkent was assigned to the Far East Steamship Company in Vladivostok. From October 1966 until February 1968 it s

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whereabouts were unreported. If it actually has been transferred to North Korea, it is the first lend-lease vessel to be sold or given to a third country for purposes other than scrapping. As one of the largest dry cargo vessels in the North Korean fleet, it would be serving double duty, first as a supply vessel or mother ship serving the offshore fishing fleet and second as a merchant vessel carrying commercial cargoes on short voyages between North Korean ports and from North Korean ports to adjacent ports in the USSR and China.

There are no available clues to the identity of the second old freighter allegedly transferred to North Korea. It also could be a lend-lease vessel. Many of the overage vessels currently being deleted from the Soviet fleet were acquired under lend-lease.

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